

STATE OF MICHIGAN
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Conservation, Forestry and Outdoor Recreation Committee

CITIZEN STATEMENT – MAY ³⁰~~25~~, 2006

Good morning, Members of the Committee and other interested parties. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today regarding House Bills 971 and 972. The results of your deliberations regarding state land in Michigan will have a far-reaching and long-term impact.

My name is James G. Meenahan. I live at 8483 Golfane Drive, Commerce Township, Michigan. Golfane Drive is adjacent to the 600-acre portion of the Proud Lake State Recreation Area, sometimes referred to as the former "Nike site."

This 600-acre park has now been designated by the DNR to be outside the boundaries of those state parklands they currently intend to protect and keep in the State Park System. The DNR has concluded, through a judgment based on a list of criteria they created, that this property no longer fulfills the "mission" of the DNR, and should therefore be sold.

In implementing the Land Consolidation Strategy, which was set into motion by NRC Order # 2627, the DNR has mistakenly included several large portions of state parks that were, I believe, never contemplated or intended by this program to identify and sell the small, unneeded tax-reverted properties. The State Parks of Michigan were purchased with taxes and fees from its residents and they are important to the community in which they are located and the region as a whole – they should not be thought of as a commodity but only sold after careful consideration of all possible alternatives.

I am here today to correct some of the misinformation provided to you previously at these hearings. First, the DNR has mischaracterized the properties they wish to sell as small, unattached, inaccessible, unmanageable, "orphan" lots that lack sufficient natural resource or recreation value to justify further preservation. The 600-acre Proud Lake parcel has 30% wetlands and provides drainage to Hayes Creek – a headwaters tributary to the Huron River. It includes a fishing pond, and it provides habitat to a variety of wildlife. It serves as a hub to the natural areas of Oakland County and is a major link to the natural areas and wildlife of all of Oakland County. It is a major open space corridor and contributes to the quality of life and character of Commerce Township and western Oakland County. It would be a tragic mistake to allow it to be lost of development. The 150-acres of parkland in the Brighton State Recreation Area are similar in their quality and importance to our area.

Second, you may have also been led to believe that there is not strong opposition from the local community to the selling of our state parks – nothing could be farther from the truth. The citizen group Save Our State Lands (S.O.S.) in Commerce Township has been – for two years – petitioning the DNR, the Governor and the Township Board of Trustees to not change Proud Lake's current use as a natural area and to not sell the property at the highest possible financial value – a price that only developers can pay. We have previously submitted 4,000 petition signatures to the DNR, and that should convince them -- and this Committee -- that there is **indeed** strong local opposition to the DNR selling our state parkland. We have also advocated that any sale of park land **must** require that a conservation easement be attached to the deed, to ensure that the park is preserved as a natural area – for future generations – in perpetuity.

We are here today to urge you to **amend** House Bills 971 and 972 so that they correct an oversight in the earlier drafts. We have the opportunity here and now to ensure that this legislation includes **all parkland properties**, whether inside or outside the arbitrary boundaries DNR has drawn, and affords them the rights and protections that are needed. One of those protections is a requirement that any parkland, inside **or** outside the so-called "boundaries," that is ultimately sold must be granted a conservation easement, either by the State of Michigan or the purchaser. In addition, when parkland is transferred to local units of government, the financial transaction must be for one dollar, but no more than its market value as open space. The conservation easement will reassure the DNR that a local government will not be able to later on sell the park at a profit.

To provide evidence of the wide public support for the above position, I am transmitting to you today an S.O.S. newsletter, a recent letter to Governor Granholm, recent newspaper articles, and a DVD recording of the third public information meeting on May 18, 2006 in Commerce Township, attended by 230 citizens.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today in support of saving the open space and natural resources for the People of Michigan.